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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
21 March 1966

ARMY review(s) completed.

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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HIGHLIGHTS

Premier Ky's relations with the Buddhists have again been severely strained, this time by Ky's public remarks on 19 March. He accused demonstrators of trying to influence the government to yield to those who are "scheming to betray or sell out the country."

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I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

Battalion-strength USMC task force elements of Operation OREGON last night fought a seven-hour engagement with an estimated three Viet Cong companies near Hue, in northern coastal Thua Thien Province (Para. 1). Reaction Operation TEXAS/LIEN KET 28 by one USMC and two ARVN battalions continues according to plan in northeast Quang Ngai Province (Para. 2). Multibattalion allied ground forces, with support from USAF B-52 Stratofortresses, are continuing to press their major offensive against Viet Cong War Zone "D," north-northeast of Saigon (Para. 3). An estimated two Viet Cong companies last night attacked elements of an ARVN battalion in Binh Tuy Province (Para. 4). Three US aircraft were lost to probable enemy ground fire yesterday while on in-country strike, medical evacuation, and reconnaissance missions (Para. 5).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

Premier Ky issued public warning over the weekend that the government would not bow to the demands of dissenters who would "sell out the nation." The Buddhist hierarchy has issued a communiqué in response expressing its "extreme surprise" at this misrepresentation of the Buddhist stand, and exhorting followers to remain calm but vigilant (Para. 1).

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The general calm in I Corps of the past few days was broken today by an antigovernment parade in Da Nang, and there are rumblings of further preparations for protest activity (Para. 6).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
Hanoi has apparently deployed additional AAA guns and some SAM equipment to the southern party of the DRV (Paras. 1-2). A captured North Vietnamese soldier confirms that Hanoi is creating infiltration units with designators duplicating those of regular North Vietnamese units in an effort to confuse ARVN and US intelligence (Paras. 3-4).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: The Liberation Front has set up a "Committee to Denounce US War Crimes in South Vietnam," which may signify that the Communists are preparing to launch a Korean war - type "germ warfare" campaign (Paras. 1-2).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Battalion-strength USMC task force elements participating in Operation OREGON--a search-and-destroy ground sweep initiated on 20 March in northern coastal Thua Thien Province--last night engaged an estimated three Viet Cong companies for more than seven hours in an area approximately 15 miles northwest of Hue. Initial casualty reports indicate nine marines killed and 41 wounded, in contrast to Communist losses of 34 killed (US body count).

2. One USMC and two ARVN battalions are continuing Operation TEXAS/LIEN KET 28, the reaction-pursuit ground sweep initiated in response to the Viet Cong battalion-size attack on 19 March against An Hoa outpost in northeast Quang Ngai Province. Friendly losses to date stand at 26 killed and 55 wounded. Known Viet Cong casualties are 56 killed.

3. Twenty-one USAF B-52 Stratofortresses yesterday attacked two separate but adjacent Viet Cong target complexes approximately 32 miles northeast of Saigon in the Communist-infested War Zone "D" base area. The strike zones were believed to contain withdrawal and reinforcement routes to the general area of a recent battle between the 271st Viet Cong Regiment and the US 173rd Airborne Brigade during Operation SILVER CITY. Meanwhile, SILVER CITY, being conducted by six reinforced allied battalions, continues according to plan but without significant enemy contact during the past 24 hours. Since its initiation on 7 March, 339 Viet Cong have been killed, as against allied casualties of 28 killed (26 US) and 252 wounded (241 US). In addition, friendly sweep forces have seized or destroyed 143 individual and crew-served weapons, more than 20,000 rounds of small-arms ammunition, 300 rounds of mortar and recoilless rifle ammunition, 11 trucks, 516 tons of rice, and 17 tons of salt. To date, a total of 628 tactical air sorties have been flown in support of the operation.

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Viet Cong Activity

4. An estimated force of two Viet Cong companies, employing mortar, recoilless rifle, and small-arms fire, last night attacked elements of an ARVN battalion in Binh Tuy Province, 70 miles northeast of Saigon. Preliminary MACV reports place government casualties at 12 killed, 23 wounded, and two missing, as against enemy losses of 67 killed (ARVN body count) and seven captured. An ARVN Ranger battalion has been dispatched as reinforcement.

5. Three US aircraft were lost to probable Viet Cong ground fire yesterday while on in-country strike, medical evacuation, and reconnaissance missions. A US Navy A-4C Skyhawk jet aircraft appeared to disintegrate, probably due to automatic weapons fire, during a napalm attack yesterday afternoon approximately 29 miles southwest of Saigon. There was no chance of pilot survival. A USMC UH-34D helicopter with a crew of four was reported missing yesterday while on a medical evacuation mission nine miles north of Da Nang. A USAF O-1E light observation aircraft was downed by suspected enemy ground fire while on a reconnaissance mission 90 miles northeast of Saigon. The pilot was killed and the observer was injured.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The Buddhist hierarchy has issued a prompt statement of dismay over Premier Ky's public remarks of 19 March during a ceremony installing the new woman mayor of Dalat. Ky, who returned to Saigon today, had declared that no strikes or demonstrations would influence the government to yield to unjustified claims of those "scheming to betray or sell out the nation." A communiqué issued today in the name of the Unified Buddhist Association (UBA) expressed "extreme surprise" at the "rash and unconstructive" declaration by the premier in alluding to Buddhist aspirations as "irrational, treasonable, and harmful." The communiqué stressed that the UBA position has been and remains moderate, disciplined, and nonviolent, and in concert with "its responsibility to the nation and the people." The communiqué urged the Buddhist faithful to remain calm and heighten their vigilance.

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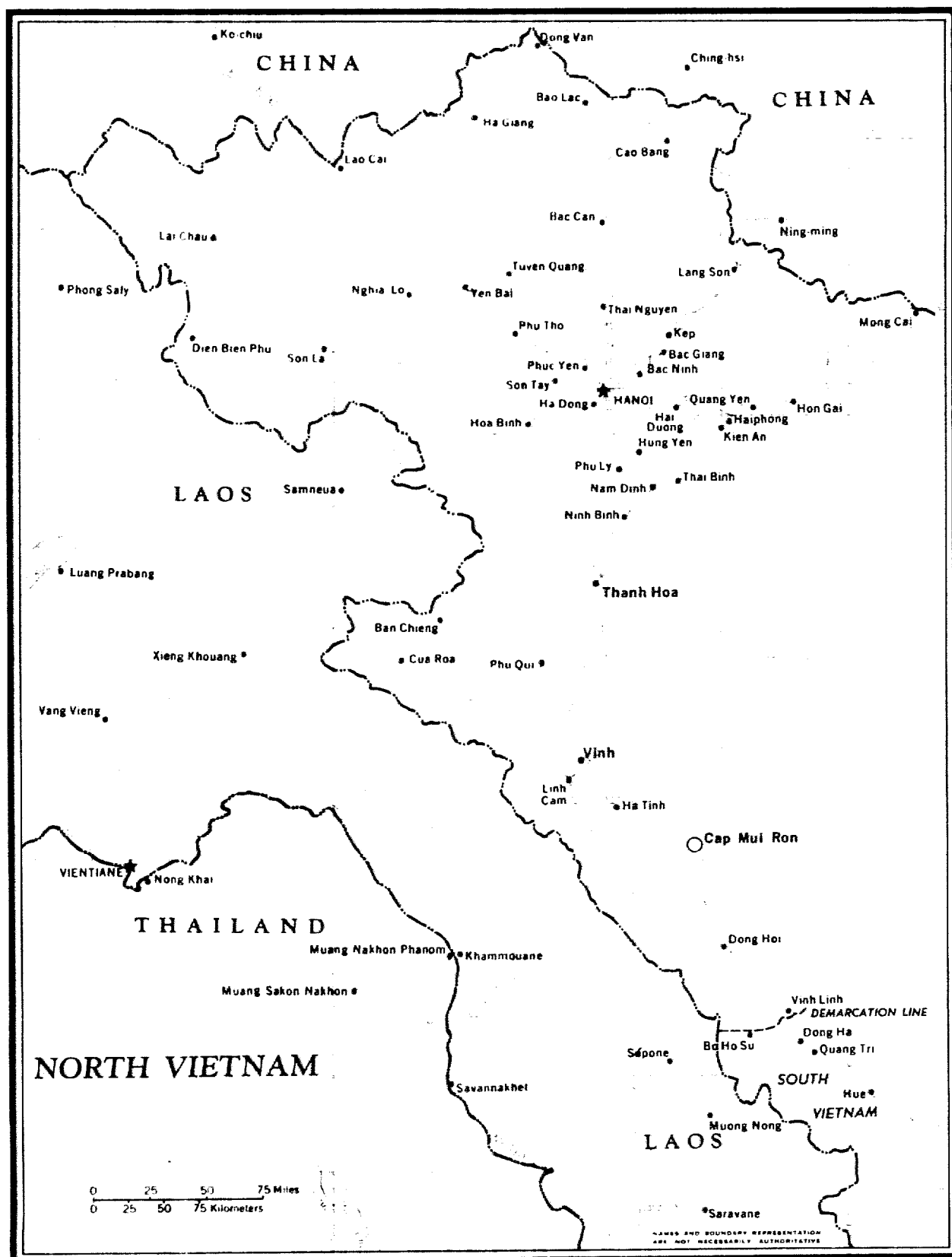
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6. The surface quiet in major government towns was ended today with an antigovernment parade in Da Nang. There are still signs of underlying tension and uneasiness. In Hue, a school boycott continues, although primary schools are expected to re-open tomorrow. Commercial activity is normal in Hue and Da Nang. The only other reported political activity of the past few days was the gathering of about 1,000 persons around the municipal building in Hue yesterday during the regular "daily radiobroadcast" by the antigovernment "struggle group," and a smaller crowd in Da Nang for a similar broadcast. There are reports that a student meeting has been called in Hue for tomorrow, and a general strike call issued for 24 March.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. The North Vietnamese have apparently deployed additional AAA guns and some SAM equipment to the southern part of the DRV, probably in response to the concentration of US air strikes which have been conducted primarily in this area since the resumption of bombing on 31 January. Two A4C Skyhawks were downed, apparently by a SAM, in the vicinity of Cap Mui Ron on 20 March. If a SAM site is confirmed in this area it would be the most southerly SAM site noted to date. Based on the number of reported SAM firings south of Thanh Hoa it seems likely that the North Vietnamese may have deployed a SAM regiment into the area.

2. During the past four days seven US aircraft have been downed over the southern part of North Vietnam, bringing total losses over North Vietnam to date to 217. Of this number, 19 have been lost to SAMs and 150 to ground fire.

3. A captured North Vietnamese soldier, [redacted] has confirmed that the North Vietnamese have been creating infiltration units with the same designator as other units which remain in the north.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. During the past month Hanoi's denunciation of "US war crimes"--such as the use of antipersonnel gas, defoliant measures in South Vietnam, and the bombing of schools and hospitals in the North--has increased in both intensity and volume. Moscow and Peking have used their propaganda apparatus to echo this theme, and on 20 March, Hanoi announced that the Liberation Front had set up a new "Committee to Denounce US War Crimes in South Vietnam." The new agency would "investigate evidence" and "collect and supply documents" to the public "both at home and abroad."

2. The inauguration of a formal committee of "investigation" and its emphasis on "documentary" proof may mean that the Vietnamese Communists are getting ready to launch an extensive Korean war - type "germ warfare" campaign with elaborately documented charges and world-wide publicity. Such a campaign, if it follows the Korean war pattern, could include new and harsher efforts to get signed "confessions" from captured US prisoners.



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